

Post



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Mar 29, 2023 · 4 min read

On a (Vietnamese Spring) Roll - March 30, 2023

Updated: Apr 2, 2023

SUMMARY

A day "At Sea" but full of activities and opportunities to eat! Late evening was an absolute blast with a music trivia contest, singing and dancing with the crew and our shipmates! Line dancing to Cupid Shuffle and Cotton-Eye Joe! - Karen

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DETAIL

On many ships one occasionally gets an 'At sea day', when you have zero ports of call. Today, for us, will be an 'At sea' day, but we're on a river, not at sea, so... hm..

We do start the day docked, still in Phnom Penh. Last night we negotiated a later group stretch start time, so we feel obligated to represent. At least one of us. I stretch with our Danish friends and one of our new Italian friends while Karen catches up on the news from back home. She has promised she'll exercise later.

Before we start limbering up the sun is already coming up on the other side of the Mekong, partially hidden by a tall, mostly complete Chinese condo. While we stretch, the crew disassembles the gangplank that we've been using to get ashore. Soon we're motoring back down (up?) the Mekong River. The ship does a few seemingly pointless pirouettes before we head downstream in earnest. We pass the heart of the city where live the most impressive skyscrapers (plus one impressive partially finished suspension bridge).

After breakfast, we hang out in our room and out on our porch, watching the Cambodian shoreline glide past. At one point we think we might be on the Thames as we pass an amusement park with an enormous Ferris wheel, reminiscent of London's Eye. Given that we have no ports of call today, there is a myriad of activities scheduled. The first is up in the bar, er, Le Salon, where we'll be introduced to the fruits of Cambodia and Vietnam.

From our seats we become better acquainted with dragon fruit (both red and white), snake fruit, soursop, guava, jack fruit, jujube, rose apple, and mango, among possible others. We're shown what they look like (both with and without skin). We're instructed in when they're available, how to select the ripest ones, and how to prepare them for eating. After that, we're invited up to taste. They vary in sweetness and texture, but they're all (with the possible exception of soursop) well received.

After a short recovery in our rooms, we head down to the dining room for a cooking demonstration. Anyone who wishes will get to try their (clumsily gloved) hand at making Vietnamese Spring Rolls. The ingredients are explained and then an expert chef quickly assembles one and rolls it up. It looks easy enough. Now it's our turn.

I offer Karen as tribute to try to make (me) a spring roll. The gloves are ridiculously large for her hands and the excess plastic keeps getting caught in the roll. The wetted rice paper sticks incredibly well to itself, whether you want it to or not. If you get off track, there's really no going back. One saving grace is that if you do screw up (not saying anyone did) you can just start over and hide your first attempt in a new roll. The end result is tasty.

After lunch, with extra beer due to being prisoners on the ship all day, we head to a demonstration of how you make a Cambodian Bride and Groom, or at least how you dress them. Similar to the egg rolls there's lots of extra material and it is rolled around the bride. There's lots of pleating and many long straight pins used to hold all of the fabric together.

Young ladies from the kitchen and spa, and young gentlemen from various parts of the ship, are used as bride and groom models. They look good but we all, to a person, decline the offer to get dressed in local wedding attire ourselves, extra beers or not. During the tucking, pleating, and pinning, we learn about the cost of a wedding, who can marry whom, minimum ages, the legality of the remedy (divorce) for marriages that don't work out.

Still not done with all our events for the day we attend the captain's party on the sundeck where we get to better acquainted with Capitan Bo and his crew. There are hors d'oeuvres and champagne opened at the ship's railing with the swift swipe of a ceremonial saber. Feeling that we should dress up, I wear my sarong and we offer Karen's to big Niclas. On me the fabric ends well below the knee. On Niclas, it's pretty much a mini-skirt. Neville, as always, has on his Myanmar cloth skirt-looking thing.

During our festivities our English-speaking and German-speaking Vietnamese guides show up. We meet our guide, Khanh, who thankfully speaks English very intelligibly. We learn a bit about his history. We hear what we'll be doing tomorrow and how, from here out, going ashore will be boarding an oversized Sampan boat.

After dinner we head back up to the lounge/bar which has been converted to a disco, complete with lights and a big sound system. The crew, for some reason, are dressed in sequined vests, one in bright yellow, one bright orange, there's a garish blue one and a muted red one. This is the music quiz and couples are divided as we're split in two teams.

For each 'question' they play a song and each team has to answer a couple of questions about the song, like who first sang this song, and who made the song a big hit. Also, the first person to charge the stage, grab the mic and start singing the song won points for his or her team. Then if the whole team came up and danced to the song, you got an extra point. Needless to say everyone was up and dancing constantly. The first song was YMCA, by the Village People, and thus the brightly sequined vests.

Everyone is very competitive and we all have a good time. In the end we all win (of course) sparkling wine, which we deferred to tomorrow, given the late hour. We eventually stagger off to our cabins. On paper Karen's team won, but the winner, really, is the ship's activity director. Good job!

Photos



Sunrise across the Mekong, peeking out from behind a not-quite-finished Chinese-funded condo building



No so many mats needed for today's stretch



The ship with downtown Phnom Penh in the distance



A cool suspension bridge under construction in Phnom Penh. For now... just a permanently open draw bridge.



This looks a tad like London's Eye



Karen showing one way to make a
Vietnamese spring roll



Karen revealing the secret ingredient she (inadvertently) put into her spring roll



Getting to know and love all the local fruit



[I don't recall seeing this in the damn job description!]



FARNSNIENTE 



Our first sunset in Vietnam. To keep the bugs off their cows? Small smoldering fire... add a soupçon of citronella



Scott and Niclas showing how to rock this year's sarongs



Getting to know the captain and crew at the captain's reception



Karen serenading the ship

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